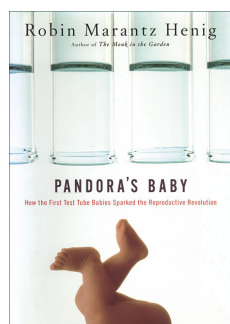


Pandora's Baby - How the first Test Tube Babies sparked the Reproductive Revolution. Robin Marantz Henig. Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory Press. 2006. 326pp. £9.99. ISBN: 978-0-87969-809-6

It is now almost thirty years since the birth of Louise Brown, the first baby to be born as a result of in-vitro fertilization (IVF). IVF was developed to overcome the problem of blocked fallopian tubes. However, with many ensuing modifications it is now used to treat infertility of almost any aetiology, including that of couples whose failure to conceive is unexplained.

Although this is a factual book it contains personal stories of patients, scientists and clinicians involved in the development of IVF. It features a rather eccentric American Gynaecologist, Landrum Shettles, whose early attempts at IVF were obstructed by a senior colleague. On the receiving end of his work was a patient, Doris Del-Zio, who would have done anything to achieve her dream of a child. Unfortunately, her dream did not materialise, and many similarities can be drawn between Del-Zio and our patients today, as the success rates for IVF remain around 25-30% per cycle.



One of the main themes running through the book is the court case brought by Del-Zio against the hospital chairman who ordered the disposal of a test-tube containing her eggs and her husband's sperm which she claimed contained her potential baby. The case, which was won by Doris Del-Zio, attracted much publicity as it coincided with the birth of Louise Brown in the UK in 1978.

It was the work of the UK scientist Bob Edwards, who teamed up with a Gynaecologist Patrick Steptoe, which was responsible for the birth of Louise Brown. Patrick Steptoe, who was a consultant in a district general hospital in Oldham, pioneered laparoscopy, which he used to retrieve mature oocytes. The book describes Bob Edwards' early work at Cambridge, as well as his collaborative work with Howard Jones and his wife at Johns Hopkins University. The Joneses went on to open the first IVF clinic in the USA, although the birth of the first American IVF baby, which was the fifteenth in the world, did not occur until 1981.

There are interesting references in the book to unsubstantiated claims of earlier successes in the field. The politics surrounding funding of IVF research in the USA are also detailed. All in all it is a fascinating book which should also appeal to non-medical readers.

Joanne McManus